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HUMOR

BY RICHARD MELTZER

"C" Is No Laughing Matter

Do you think I'm funny? I don't think I'm funny. Hardly anyone ever says, "Meltzer, what a funny guy!" — and never to my face. There are few as grimly unfunny as me.

I'm not funny, but is anything funny? Is life, for instance, funny? Is death funny? Is humor funny?

Basically, since I'm about to write about them, I need to know if airplanes, cigarette smoke and/or crying babies are funny. Because if not, you're as likely to find laughs & lightness in the Music, Astrology and Health columns as right here in Humor with a capital "H." So let's see if smoky planes play — smoky *baby* planes — before we waste your time and mine in a grim, silly exercise in "entertainment."

I was on this plane, see, en route to Florida. Holiday with "the folks." "Smoking or non-smoking?" I'd chosen smoking. It was a really crummy flight. Why am I using italics? This really happened. To me. A real me, not a fake, fictional or composite me. One of the worst goddamn flights of my life.

Incredibly late departure and arrival. A joke-telling pilot. Major turbulence. Talky assholes to the left and right. Lost luggage. My connecting flight canceled. Snotty flight attendants who should just *die*. They even ran out of food. But the worst thing about it was the smoke. Heinous, horrible cig smoke — not cigar or pipe.

Cigar I don't mind, and nobody minds pipe, maybe a couple people. Pipes are fine, great, they smell like people over 40 and burning logs. But burning *paper* — cig'rettes — how can anyone stand all that burning paper? Dunno, so it really burns me how they don't even *allow* cigars, pipes anymore in airborne smoke pits. Or bidis, which smell kind of like smoldering leaves in northeastern autumnal America — I bet they don't allow *them* anymore, either. To blot out, or at least compete with, the stink-o-paper.

I mean, heck, 's not even as if I felt endangered, particularly, by the grisly threat of "C." (Cf. the newest reports on cancer and inhaling the smokings of others.) If I haven't cancerized my vital innards just by breathing the air, air *without* the tobacco-combustion leavings of the sick fucks who directly ingest 'em — if I'm not already 80 percent there from preservatives in macaroni I et when I was 12 — then neither (I believe) will 5, 6, 7 hours in a chamber of ingesters make a difference. *Tubes in his arm . . . ratty, peeling paint and/or wallpaper . . . the county "C" ward at dusk . . . noon . . . cloud-obscured sunrise. (All times to die are as grim & grisly.) "Yes, doctor" — Nurse Peabody stifles a tear — "the gentleman was an . . . oh, it's so sad . . . he sat with the smokers on Flight 59."*

But no — whew — that's not the number.

The number, simply, once more for the *very* last time, is aversion to smell. The Sunday *Times* ablaze in the seat to my left; the Friday *Herald* afire in the seat to my right; and in my own lap, *The Sonnets of William Shakespeare* — unkindled. I don't smoke.

He don't smoke! He don't smoke! So what's he doin' in "smoking"? Funny you should ask.

I sat in smoking, as I always do, to avoid sitting with crying brats.

Owners and borrowers of brats, whether they smoke themselves or not, tend to wanna *transport* the brat in a smoke-free environment. If they gotta smoke, just can't wait, they hand over the brat, walk over back near the bathroom, light up, show their lungs a *good time*. But it don't look good if the brat's on your lap while you do it. I know, some people are "two-faced." (Fuckaduck.)

Anyway, I don't know about you, but I for one would rather sit inside a burning, blazing paper *factory* (or warehouse) than be forced to gratuitously endure sonic baby trauma. Right, I don't own one but, yes, I have borrowed — that's not gratuitous. But gratuitous or non-, it's the sound, the grief, the blood-curdling sonic grief, the trauma. 'S like hearing the Nuremburg Trials in *loud* stereo while you brush your teeth. Gosh golly! And I'm just too sensitive and compassionate a slob to go around monitoring the oral agonies of infanthoods I have neither (a) caused nor (b) encouraged, particularly in confined spaces above sea level. Call me a cad, call my mom a whore, but, hey, it takes all kinds. I'm sure you can dig it.

So anyway: a miserable, horrible, awful, shitty flight. The jerk next to me, in addition to smoking two weeks' worth of *Times*, a couple-three film scripts and my Shakespeare while I wasn't looking, would not shut *up* on the "greatness of Cosby" — I assume he meant Bill. On the other side, all this guy wants to talk (between mega-tokes of Carlton) is Jessica Lange. "She can really *act*." That's beautiful. *So fine, great, they'll have some culture to discourse on their "C" bed.*

But what am *I* gloating? Meanwhile my luggage is headed for Squodunk or Oshkosh. And meanwhile in *non*-smoking . . . Well, I don't know yet what's shaking in non-smoking. But over in non-smoking — I find this out when I deplane — *there are no babies*. No infants. Not a one on this horrible, miserable, smoky, choky flight!

"Aha!" laughs Pax the Clicker in *Creation of the Humanoids*, "Irony! One of the *funniest* forms of humor!"

So fuck *me*. □

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